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**N. W. Bernstein, Ethics, Identity, and Community in Later Roman Declamation. New York and Oxford 2013**

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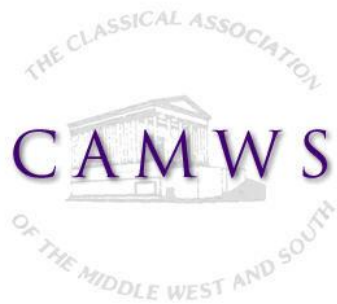
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## **CJ-Online ~ 2014.12.01**

*Ethics, Identity and Community in Later Roman Declamation.* By NEIL W. BERNSTEIN. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. IX + 240. Hardcover. £50 ISBN 978-0-19-996411-6.

Reviewed by Andrea Balbo, *Università di Torino (Italia)*, [andrea.balbo@unito.it](mailto:andrea.balbo@unito.it)

Bernstein's book deals with a very important topic in the domain of declamatory studies, the problem of the usefulness of the *corpus declamatorium* to understand processes and dynamics of Roman society in Imperial age. He focuses his attention on Major Declamations. In the introduction he assumes as a common background van Mal Maeder's concept of a Sophistopolis built by the fictive world of declaimers. Through an uncommon but useful choice for the reader, he summarizes the key elements of the content of the section 1 of the book, which is the main one of his work.

Part 1, entitled *Law, Ethics and Community in Sophistopolis*, is divided into four chapters, entitled Authority, Verification, Reciprocity and Visuality. Through the analysis of the Major Declamations he studies the crisis of the concept of military authority in the case of *Miles Marianus* (*decl. maior* 3) and of the *Dives accusatus proditoris* (*decl. maior* 11), discussing as well the problems of legitimation of military high officers, the relationships between authority, charisma, law and ethics.

In the chapter related to Verification the author explores the methods used to check the reality of the claims, such as the torture and the astrological predictions, in *decl. maior* 4 (*Mathematicus*), 7 (*Tormenta pauperis*), 8 (*Gemini languentes*). In the third chapter he deals with reciprocity in obligations in *decl. maior* 5 (*Aeger redemptus*), 6 (*Manus caecae*), 9 (*Gladiator*), 13 (*Apes pauperis*), 16 (*Amici vades*). Then, the fourth chapter examines analyses in *decl. maior* 1 (*Paries palmatus*), 2 (*Caecus in limine*), 7, 18 and 19 (*Infamis in matrem*), the meaning of evidence of the described events under the eyes of spectators.

The second part of the book, entitled *Responding to Major Declamations*, studies two cases of reception of ancient declamation, Juan Luis Vives (1492-1540)' *For the Stepmother* (a response to *decl. maior* 1) and Lorenzo Patarol (1674-1727)'s *Antilogiae* (with particular attention to *decl. 1* too), describing in a short but effective way the methods and the results of modern authors activity of *aemulatio*. A very short postscript, "Declamation, Controversiality and Contemporary Pedagogy," starts to develop the discussion on a very interesting subject, the role of declamation in modern rhetoric studies and in contemporary

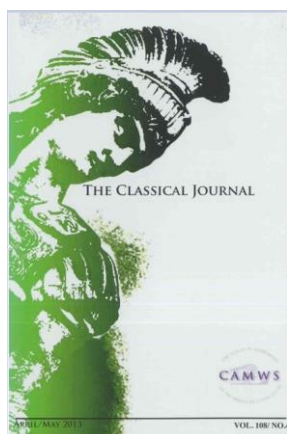
trends of teaching styles, in particular as an example of controversial thought (*disputatio in utramque partem*).

The last part of the book includes two appendixes, text and translation of Lorenzo Patarol's *Antilogia* 1 and themes of major declamations. A rich bibliography and two indexes, with important names, concepts and *loci*, close the work.

What is the relevance of this book on the declamatory studies? Considerable. Bernstein's work can be appreciated for his attempt to draw from ps. Quintilian's collection some useful statements about Roman ethical commitment. Even if his results should be confirmed also in the light of Seneca's and Calpurnius' declamations, his work improves our knowledge of Roman perception of virtues and merits, helping us in understanding some anthropological phenomena connected as well with psychological perception of crisis and social changes, i.e. the symptoms of insecurity of the elites, the problems of identity and handicap (see the blind in *decl. maior* 1) and the mutual exchange between relatives and friends (the problem of *donum* and *beneficium* seen in a perspective different from Seneca's one).

Moreover, Bernstein's book is very important also from a rhetorical point of view, because he allows us to understand better some argumentative processes in the Major declamations. In particular, exploring the connections between word and images (see for instance the description of torture in *decl. maior* 7 and 18-19), he shows how the use of verbs of domain of sight is important, in order to create a real spectacle in the declamations; furthermore, Bernstein explains in a very clear way how declamation themes try to insert in the domain of household extreme situations that embarrass the system of Roman virtues and reinforce the role of "crash test" for these texts (as G. Calboli said). Another important aspect of Bernstein's work is his interest in the heritage of the declamation in European modern literature; in particular, he pays attention to the argumentative activity of responding to the ancient text, a way to recreate and not merely to imitate it. This sort of multidisciplinary research, that connects literature and anthropology, should be developed and enriched. To sum up, Bernstein's book gives the scholars interested in declamation a large number of hints for new developments and insights both from rhetorical and classical heritage point of view.

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